

JUNE 1, 2005

1:45 to 3:15 PANEL DISCUSSION

REMARKS of PARRIS GLENDENING

- * Smart growth is about helping existing communities address the most important issues to their citizens. It is about addressing traffic congestion, and providing more transportation choices. It is about stemming the loss of vital open spaces and increasing access to parks and recreation. It is about reining in future tax increases, by encouraging more orderly and efficient development, using existing infrastructure. It is about enhancing quality of life. And, it is largely about health.
- * The health of Americans, particularly of American children, is in serious decline. We are truly in a crisis of health in this country. There are critical links between eating patterns and exercise levels and overall health.
 - o Poor eating habits and a lack of even minimal exercise have contributed to expanding waistlines and weight-related health complications that so many Americans are fighting.
- What you may be less familiar with, however, is the critical link between the **built environment** and our health. This was a link that Smart Growth America made well-known with its 2003 publication, Measuring the Health Effects of Sprawl.
- This report found that the nation's **most sprawling counties** are also its **heaviest**. As different factors indicative of sprawling, poorly planned development increase, so too does the average body mass index, or BMI. We found that individuals in the most sprawling counties not only weighed more than their compactly living counterparts, but also, they had the highest blood pressure, and were more likely to have heart disease.
- Since the publication of this report, exactly one year ago, it has been extensively referenced in over fifty newspaper and journal articles. The report was so popular, in fact, that we ran through all 10,000 printed copies in just a week or two! Clearly, something in this report is catching people's attention.
- It is the idea that the way we have used the land--where and how we choose to build new homes, schools, and businesses -- contributes to our individual and collective weight gain, and to many of our health problems as a nation.
- You are all familiar with the patterns of land use and development that have become commonplace across America. Most Americans now live in places
 - o Where you cannot buy a quart of milk without getting into your 2,000 pound car.
 - o Where your children cannot play in a forty-minute soccer game, without sitting in the car for half an hour each way.
 - o Where open space, farmlands, and forests are being gobbled up by haphazard, poorly planned development.
 - o Where office, shopping, and residential areas are separated by large distances.

- Where older urban areas, and inner ring suburbs, are being deserted for more cheaply built, newer developments that stand in former greenfields.
- THIS is sprawl, and it is absolutely killing Americans. Even children—traditionally the MOST active members of society--are not immune to the negative health effects of sprawl.
- Walking to school: 71% of adults with children recall walking or bicycling to school. Today, only 18% of their children walk or bike to school. Children are no longer walking to school, adults are no longer walking to work-- No one is walking ANYWHERE.
- Why? Because it is no longer safe or convenient for them to do so. Our communities are now planned so that:
 - Many residential streets dead-end in cul-de-sacs, making walking to a destination nearly impossible.
 - Many other local streets lack sidewalks, forcing would-be pedestrians into dangerous roadways.
 - And many residential neighborhoods are located much too far from destinations realistically reachable by foot.
- These development patterns, in turn, deprive us and our children of the kind of exercise that should be as natural and simple as breathing. Almost everyone can walk, when provided with safe destinations, and safe routes. These are just as important for the mobility and quality of life for those who cannot walk, and who are disabled! We ALL benefit from sidewalks and nearby destinations!
- Unfortunately, the way we have built our communities not only makes it impossible to get around without a car—because we have no where to walk to, and nothing to walk on—but also! It forces us all to spend hours of the day --that could be spend in exercising or recreating with our families or friends--in our cars instead. Without the opportunity to incorporate simple physical activity into daily life, we are all are gaining weight, and rapidly.
- Increased dependence on driving and on our cars contributes to air pollution, and to the increased rates of asthma we are seeing in our children: According to the EPA, the percentage of kids with asthma **doubled** between 1980 and 1995—from 3.6% to 7.5%. By 2001, 8.7% of American kids suffered from asthma. In addition, the increased pavement cover and the increased emissions from cars contributes to poor water quality.
- Poorly planned development, as you can see, is a serious problem. Not just about:
 - infrastructure and tax dollars wasted by building farther and farther away from the center.
 - loss of green open spaces for recreation and for environmental health.
 - disinvestment of our existing urban areas.
 - → It is about the health of our children, our families, and our communities.

- What can we do?
- 1) Understand the causes of sprawl:
 - Understand the policies and laws that make it easier for developers to build outside of existing urban and suburban areas, than to encourage reinvestment in those areas.
 - Understand how local governments favor the building of new roads, rather than investing in public transit, or in making existing roads safe for walking and biking.
 - Understand that this country, for over sixty years, has been subsidizing sprawl. We are subsidizing our own physical destruction.
- 2) Change policies. I STRONGLY encourage you to work with your federal, state and local officials to change the policies that favor sprawling, haphazard, thoughtless development.
- As governor of Maryland, I collaborated with our state legislature to establish a number of different programs and policies that attempted to level the playing field—
 - AWAY from sprawling and haphazard development,
 - and back towards healthy, vibrant communities.
- We wanted to make it easier to invest in existing communities—
 - where children can walk places and interact with their neighbors,
 - and where the infrastructure, schools, police, roads and all already exist.
- We worked at the issue from two ends: First, we established programs to permanently preserve farmland, and natural wilderness areas in Maryland.
 - During my tenure as governor, in fact, we were able to permanently preserve over 400,000 acres.
- Second, we changed our policies to make it more possible and profitable for developers and investors to build in existing communities.
 - For example, we instituted a Historic Preservation Tax Credit.
 - This credit gave 25% of the cost of redevelopment back to investors who were rehabilitating our downtown properties,
 - and buildings of community importance.
 - Without these tax credits in Maryland, hundreds of rehabilitation projects would never have happened, and we would have continued to lose our core communities, and to have spread even further out and apart.
- Besides changing tax policies to make smart growth feasible, we also had to change zoning codes and building regulations, to allow mixed-use areas to be built. Did you know that—in most places in this country—it would actually be *illegal* to try to build some of our most beloved older mixed-use neighborhoods,
 - Places like Annapolis, MD, my home?

- Believe it or not, the separation of uses that keeps us in our cars, sitting in traffic, and growing ever more obese and frustrated, is actually written into our laws!
 - We thought that this kind of zoning was ridiculous, so we changed it.
- We also encouraged the building of higher density development around existing public transit—apartment buildings, retail, and office space.
 - In fact, linking these higher density residential areas to businesses and schools with transit will be critical to getting people out of their cars, and onto the streets for their health.
- 3) Besides working to change the tax policies and codes that currently perpetuate sprawl, you must encourage your local and state governments to invest in pedestrian and biking infrastructure.
- To correct this in Maryland, we worked hard to balance our state transportation budget, and to move away from its lopsided emphasis on building new highways.
 - It is essential to shift funding towards public transit, and towards pedestrian and bike projects,
 - to encourage livable and walkable communities,
- Changing policies and codes like these so that they promote, rather than hinder, smart growth, will determine whether our built environment will be a mess of single-use areas, divided by highways and long distances, or whether our children will be able to walk to school, to the store for a popsicle, or ride their bikes to the park.
- I encourage you to work with your federal, state and local officials, to see if land conservation programs can be implemented,
 - and if policies can be changed to support, rather than impede, smart growth.
- Creating a healthy built environment for our children will truly be the KEY to making them-- and ourselves-- healthy once again.
- **CONCLUSION: The way we have structured our built environment is making us, and our children, obese.** Children are no longer within walking or biking distance of school, or the store—AND the kinds of high-speed freeways that have replaced our main streets are not safe!
- As a result of these changes, we and our children are not getting the kinds of exercise that should be inherent,
 - and the health repercussions are mounting rapidly—
 - we can see it clearly in the statistics on childhood obesity, asthma, and diabetes.
- We **MUST** make these human impacts of sprawl a reality to policy makers.
 - → We **MUST change the culture**, to make walking and moving the norm, and getting in the car a conscious choice rather than an automatic default.

- We **MUST** overturn the out-dated policies and codes of the past fifty years, which put our destinations out of our reach,
 - and forced us all into our cars and into traffic.

- I am telling you today: we **CAN** make it possible for children to know a better life,
 - where they can run to friends houses,
 - play in the local parks,
 - ride bikes,
 - walk to school,
 - **AND** live longer, healthier, more productive lives because of it.

- It will start with small changes to our codes and policies-- changes that we can commit ourselves to today.

- For the most part, you are all experts on health.
 - People listen to you.
 - They look to **YOU** for solutions.
 - For your help and leadership on this issue, I—and the children of this nation—thank you.

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